

5.C.3

Notes on the Hebrew Insane

By Frank G. Hyde, M. D.

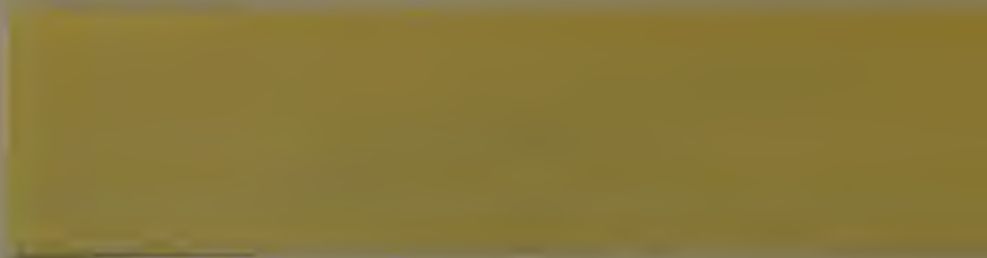
Reprinted from Proceedings of
American Medico-Psychological Association
Milwaukee, Wis.
1901.

[From C. F. Beadles' library 1933]
WRL:jam



Compliments of

A. E. MACDONALD, M. D.,
Superintendent,
Manhattan State Hospital, East,
Ward's Island.



NOTES ON THE HEBREW INSANE.*

*By Frank G. Hyde, M. D.,
Ward's Island, New York City.*

This contribution is made up of observations and statistics gathered for the purpose of furthering the study of the Hebrew insane.

This subject was brought to the attention of the Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain at its meeting in London in 1900, by a paper read by Dr. Cecil F. Beadles, of Colney Hatch Asylum. While aware of the fact that statistics at times are likely to prove misleading, still the number of cases and length of the period from which these data are collaborated may make them worthy of consideration. The insane Hebrew—and in this classification I include Jews of all nationalities—has occupied the attention of the profession from Bible times, as mentioned in the Books of St. Mark, St. Luke and St. Matthew.

More recently there has appeared an article bearing on this subject entitled "The Comparative Pathology of the Jews," by Maurice Fishberg, M. D., of New York, published in the Medical Journal and from which I quote from time to time. This investigation covers the period from December 13, 1871, to November 30, 1900, inclusive, and all patients admitted to the Manhattan State Hospital East, during that time—a total of 17,135 cases. The first element to attract attention is the enormous increase in admissions of Hebrews in recent years. This undoubtedly may be accounted for by the great increase in immigration of Jews from Europe to this country in search of more lucrative vocations than they enjoy in their native lands and, as they are attracted by the many opportunities afforded by the metropolis, remain. Many of these, predisposed to psychoses, unable to cope with the unequal conditions, break down and eventually find their way to the hospital. The men who are

*Read at the Annual Meeting of the American-Medico Psychological Association, held at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June, 1901.

admitted are largely drawn from those who are employed in sweat shops and as hucksters; these on the one hand laboring many hours a day in close, ill-ventilated shops with little or no exercise, and closely packed in squalid tenements at night—constantly ignoring the law of cleanliness—are thereby placed in the most suitable surroundings to bring out hereditary tendencies toward insanity. The Hebrews as a race are hysterical and neurasthenic. Raymond* states that “hysteria is frequent among both men and women in Warsaw (Poland). The Jewish population of that city alone is almost exclusively the inexhaustible source for the supply of hysterical males for the whole continent.” By those who are associated with Hebrews in hospitals the men are looked upon as neurotic. It is difficult in many cases to obtain satisfactory histories of this class of patients owing in part to the suspiciousness of friends of patients and on the other to their unwillingness to admit hereditary influences. On the first show of returning reason the relatives or those dependent on Hebrew patients make continued importunities for their release and in cases where these requests are complied with the patients are at once permitted to resume their struggle for riches, with the result, in a great many cases, of prompt return to the hospital. Such cases as become chronic are usually the most troublesome of the hopeless insane. They are as a rule ignorant, vicious, suspicious, complaining and frequently morally perverted.

The influence of hospital life on the Hebrew insane in itself is very beneficial owing, no doubt, in large part, to removal from unsanitary and mal-hygienic surroundings, to regularity of habits, rest to an over-worked nervous system, change of diet and removal from the over-crowded conditions of those quarters of the city from which they, for the most part, are drawn.

The recovery rate is fairly good for Hebrews under 30 years of age, but the tendency for most of them who have become unbalanced and recover is to swell the re-admissions to the hospital as, owing to their excitable ways of living, they readily break down and are returned to the hospital. A perusal of the case books show masturbation and loss of money to be frequent

* Fishberg, “Comparative Pathology of Jews.”

assigned causes of mental break-down in addition to unhygienic surroundings and hereditary tendencies.

The notes in this paper are made only on the male Hebrew insane, inasmuch as the females are committed to the Manhattan State Hospital West.

Of the 17,135 cases admitted to the hospital, 1,722 were Jews, or 10.05%. In reckoning from the opening of the hospital we find 72 Hebrews with histories of syphilis, or 4.17% of Hebrew admissions. This figure is low and shows the Hebrews suffer less from this disease than Christians. Of the 1,722 Hebrews admitted 95 have a history of alcoholism, 5.516%. This figure is also low and shows alcoholic excesses to be comparatively rare in the race. In order to ascertain what changes there might be by taking the figures from more recent dates I have tabulated the five years ending November 30, 1900. During this time there were 3,710 admissions, and of these there were 573 Hebrews, or 15.44%. This shows the increase of Hebrew admissions as compared with the figures before mentioned. Of these 573 Hebrews, syphilis was present in 5.58%. Alcoholism was present in 5.24%. Paresis was present in 18.05% of the Hebrews admitted. This form of insanity, while high in the Hebrew race, is probably not as high as the proportion which obtains among Christians. Dr. Savage* in discussing Dr. Beadles' paper states "in my experience there is very little general paralysis, either among the men or women (Jewish). Just as other races are affected, general paralysis among Jews have nearly all had some history of syphilitic degeneration."

I intend to continue my investigation of insanity in the Hebrew as compared with other nationalities, and I hope to be able at some future meeting to submit the results for your consideration.

* Journal of Mental Science, Vol. XLVI, page 736.

FRANK G. HYDE.

DISCUSSION.

DR. J. C. CLARK: The essayist says that the Hebrews are particularly troublesome and vicious. Since I have been in charge of the hospital in Maryland I have had to discharge two attendants for beating the Hebrews. One of the patients was a young man, who it seems is particularly aggravating and the attendants couldn't resist the temptation. Of the five attendants discharged in my short tenure of office, two have been discharged for beating Hebrews.

DR. C. G. HILL: The question arises whether that may not be due to the prejudice against the Jews.

DR. J. C. CLARK: Well, they say the patient is particularly aggravating.

DR. WOODSON: My knowledge of the Jews inside of an institution is limited. It may be that specific disease is not prevalent among them and general paresis is rare. Our percentage of recoveries is far less in that race than in any other race we treat. That may be largely due to the fact that whenever one of that race comes on an excursion near an institution, if he has acquaintances in the institution, he will call and see them. They give us more trouble as visitors, and especially are they more persistent in their desires to see the patients, than any other nationality we have to deal with.

DR. TOBEY: I am a friend of the Jews and I don't like this thing very much of discussing people by class anyhow. I have had to deal with Jews and with Gentiles and my experience is just opposite to that of Dr. Woodson. I have not had to deal with any class that has been so grateful for kindness to their friends as the Jews. Their devotion to each other is very great. But I don't like this discussion of churches or classes.

DR. BRUSH: Studies of the kind made by Dr. Hyde are of much interest, and I hope he will continue them. I have been struck during the last ten years by the apparent increase of mental and nervous disorders among the Jews. Quite a large proportion of the paretics admitted to Sheppard has been drawn from this race. I am unable however to say what the exact proportion has been.

DR. WISE: I think the discussion shows how unreliable statistics are.

DR. MACDONALD: There will be a little further discussion, and that of the last remark of the chairman. I do not think that the paper gave evidence of the unreliability of statistics, and I think that a young gentleman of a hospital staff, who goes to the trouble of examining the records of some seventeen thousand cases in order to place statistics at the service of others, deserves better than to have his results so characterized.

If the paper deserves condemnation, I am willing to accept the responsibility and blame, as it was prepared at my suggestion by one member of my staff, and has been presented here by another. It seems to me that investigation of the influences of nationality or religion upon habits of life and their relations to insanity is and always will be of interest. It cer-

NOTES ON THE HEBREW INSANE.

tainly was considered sufficiently so by the members of the British Medico-Psychological Association, before whom the paper of Dr. Cecil F. Beadles, to which Dr. Hyde refers, was read, at its meeting in London last year. I happened to be present then, and finding Dr. Beadles' paper of special interest, and his experience in some respects unlike my own in this country, I arranged with Dr. Hyde to look up our own figures. This he has done with considerable labor, and you will observe that he has submitted them for what they are worth, and without extended comment or fine-drawn conclusions.

The discussion has drifted somewhat away from the text of the paper, and we have heard perhaps more of the relation of the friends of the Jewish patients to the hospital, and incidentally of the attendants to the Jewish patients. It is possible that what has been said in criticism is really rather to the credit of the race. For myself, having probably a larger percentage of Jewish patients than any other hospital in the country, I will say, that while visiting relatives and friends are generally persistent, and often troublesome and exasperating, I think it is really to their credit. It is part of the instinct of the race which gains them admitted pre-eminence in the care of their sick or poor or dependent. I should be glad to see the same interest taken by people of other nationalities and religions.

As to cruelty of employees being more conspicuously directed toward Jewish patients, may not that also be rather, though indirectly, to the credit of the Jewish race? They are proverbially patient and long suffering. Had the attendant in question beaten an Irishman instead of an Israelite, for example, his punishment would probably have followed more promptly and without the intervention of the superintendents.

DR. WOODSON: I believe the visits of the relatives are often injurious to the patient. The Hebrews are especially free from venereal diseases. All in all I feel that I have said about as much for the Jewish race in my remarks as anybody on the floor.

DR. BRUSH. I had not intended in any way to attack the Jews, but I thought the Association ought to get the facts.